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ABSTRACT

This is a report on the relationship of North American Indian athletic games to ceremonies. Data for this investigation were researched from 48 "Annual Reports of the Bureau of American Ethnology, Smithsonian Institution" published from 1881 to 1933, and the 84 volumes of the "American Anthropologist" published from 1888 to 1974. Observational reports from American ethnologists and anthropologists were also included. Forty-six examples of North American Indian athletic game-ceremonial relationships were collected. Thirty-one tribes were represented in the data. The results indicated that ceremonial rites, both need-related and game-success-oriented, formed a major category of the athletic game/ceremony relationship. Ceremonial rituals also formed a major category of the relationship. It was shown that the ceremonial accompaniment aspect was a minor category of the athletic game and ceremony relationship; when the ceremonies were over, the games, as entertainment, began. Based upon the accounts from which the data were drawn, it is shown that North American Indian athletic games were not without ceremonial relationships. Tribal culture was integrated into native North America ceremonial athletic games in a number of ways. (RC)

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NATIVE AMERICAN CEREMONIAL ATHLETIC GAMES

Athletic games usually are associated with sport and recreation among enlightened people. Such games also were associated with recreation and sport among native North Americans. But in addition the functional significance of games in North American Indian cultures extended also to ceremonial life.

Problem

The problem under investigation concerned itself with determining the association of North American Indian athletic games with ceremonies and with organizing the possible resulting association. The primary problem had two sub-problems. One concerned the possible linkage of individual games with subdivisions of tribal ceremonies. The second sub-problem involved the possible linkage of particular tribes with ceremonial subdivisions.

Procedure and Definitions

Data for this investigation were researched from the forty-eight Annual Reports of the Bureau of American Ethnology, Smithsonian Institution published from 1881 to 1933 and the eighty-four volumes of the American Anthropologist published from 1888 to 1974. Observational reports from such preeminent early American ethnologists as George Bird Grinnell, George A. Dorsey, James Mooney, Walter Hoffman, Matilda Coxe Stevenson, and Lewis L. Meeker were included heavily

ED114394

SP09 645

in the data source. In addition, the observations of the noted early historians of the North American Indian, James Adair, Lewis Henry Morgan, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, and George Catlin, also were included.

Collected from the written accounts were direct statements verifying relationships between North American Indian athletic games and ceremonies of the culture. Preliminary investigation revealed that ceremony-athletic game relationships in North American Indian cultures were capable of being organized into four somewhat distinct divisions: (1) Ceremonial Life Sustaining Rites, (2) Ceremonial Game Success Rites, (3) Ceremonial Rituals, and (4) Ceremonial Accompaniments. Athletic games and tribal units were examined as they related to these divisions.

The operational characteristics of categorical terms basic to the investigation were defined:

- (1) Game. A contest characterized by (a) organized play, (b) two or more sides, (c) criteria for determining the winner, and (d) agreed upon rules.
- (2) Ceremonial life sustaining rites. Formal dignified acts on special occasions invoking the intervention of a supernatural being with regard to a basic need of life.
- (3) Ceremonial game success rites. Solemn practices invoking the intervention of a supernatural being with regard to the explicit function of success in the game.
- (4) Ceremonial rituals. Formal gestures as dance, taboos, and charms on special occasions.
- (5) Ceremonial accompaniments. Acts which took place along side but not as an integral part of a solemn practice.

Limitations

There were a number of limitations inherent in the study:

- (1) While North American Indian games included both games of chance and games of athletic skill, this study was restricted to ceremonial aspects of athletic games. Those athletic games included the North American Indian ball games of racket, doubleball, shinny, and kickball; the dart, arrow, and javelin games of darts, archery, hoop and pole, ring and pin, and snowsnake; and the footraces which included relay races and kicked stick races.
- (2) Collected data were restricted to accounts dealing with North American Indians residing within the North American territorial confines of present day United States of America and Canada.

Results

From the data researched, forty-six examples of North American Indian athletic game-ceremonial relationships were collected--forty-six examples with some positive relationship of a tribe-game-ceremony trichotomy. Thirty-one tribes were represented in the data.

Preliminary examination had developed a division of the ceremony variant into four categories, not mutually exclusive. Within ceremonial life sustaining rites, the athletic game was an essential action in a religious practice, the implicit function of which was related to a basic need of life. The research revealed twenty such tribal ceremonial rites involving athletic games. Seventeen of these rites were supplication rites; five petitioned for health and longevity, five for success in the hunt, and five for rain. Supplication ceremonial rites also were held for medicine and to hasten the spring of the year.

Celebration rites involving athletic games were held by three tribes to celebrate success in the hunt and harvest; specifically to celebrate the capture of a whale, the first run

of salmon, and the harvest of corn. In addition, an athletic game was held in one instance as a penitential-reparation rite and in one instance as a funeral rite.

The North American Indian athletic games most closely associated with life sustaining rites were hoop and pole and the footraces with seven and six associations respectively.

Southwest culture area Indians--Zuni, Tewa, Keres, White Mountain Apache, and Jicarilla Apache, with the Zuni in particular--accounted for nine of the twenty tribal athletic games held as life sustaining rites. In addition, the Huron, Menominee, and Sauk and Fox of the Northeast Woodlands; the Pawnee, Oglala Dakota, and Omaha of the Plains; the Makah and Wasco of the Northwest Coast; the Klamath of the Plateaus; and the Pitkachi of California utilized athletic games as ceremonial life sustaining rites.

While athletic games were inherent in a number of native American life sustaining rites, ceremonial rites invoking game success also were exemplified in the data. In these rites the supernatural was invoked to aid in the success of the respective contestant; winning the contest was the important element. Medicine men invoked the assistance of the tutelary guardians or protectors. Shamen conjured to make medicine and to bring supernatural powers to the athletes of a particular side and to compass the defeat and even to disable or bring death to a rival. From the forty-six examples exemplifying the tribe-athletic game-ceremony trichotomy, ten illustrations of ceremonial game success rites were present. Six of the ten were mutually exclusive with the life sustaining ceremonial rites; four were dual-purposed.

The athletic games of racket, footracing, and hoop and pole were the North American Indian athletic games in which game success rites were present with six, two, and two examples respectively from the data researched.

Southeast Woodlands Indians-- Cherokee, Choctaw, and Creek--invoked the supernatural for success in their games of racket and the Menominee of the Northeast Woodlands also. The Zuni and Jicarilla Apache invoked their supernatural spirits for success in the footraces while White Mountain Apache and Teton Dakota manifested the ceremonial game success rite in hoop and pole.

Ceremonial rituals also played a part in the native American ceremony-athletic game relationship. The data yielded twenty-seven instances of ceremonial rituals occurring with native American athletic games. Ceremonial ritual was as likely to occur with ceremonial rite as it was not; in thirteen instances ritual occurred with rite and in fourteen, ritual occurred in the absence of rite.

Fourteen positive ceremonial rituals were evidenced from the data: feasts, fasts, diets, costume and decoration, dance and music, smoking, vigils, taboos, charms and medicine ointment, sacred substances, offerings or sacrificed objects, emetics, mortification, and washing. The rituals which took place with greatest frequency with tribal athletic games were costume and decoration and dance and music. These rituals were cited sixteen and fifteen times or in at least half of all instances when rituals were observed. Those rituals cited above the mean number of citations, five, were feasts, charms or medicine-ointment, and vigils.

Ceremonial rituals were positive most often with the game of racket--fifteen of the twenty-seven references from the data. Athletic game ceremonial rituals were present in six tribal cultures for the footrace and averaged three rituals per reference, the same as in racket.

The use of ceremonial rituals was especially notable in particular tribes. Specific tribes practiced from one to seven rituals with particular games, three being the mean. Those tribes utilizing more than three rituals were the Cherokee, Canadian Iroquois, Jicarilla Apache, Zuni, and Choctaw.

In addition to athletic game ceremonial rites and ceremonial rituals, at times athletic games were the accompaniment of native American religious and civil ceremony. In such instances the athletic games were not a part of rite nor did ceremonial ritual augment the athletic game. Rather the athletic games were adjuncts of the ceremonies added for the amusement and social life of the members of the tribe. There were seven examples of this in the data.

The games that accompanied ceremonies as amusements were racket, hoop and pole, and snowsnake, with racket exhibiting four examples of the seven.

Northeast Woodland Indians especially, Five Nations Iroquois, Winnebago, and Huron, utilized athletic games in this manner. With the Five Nation Iroquois, athletic games accompanied their Mourning Councils, civil ceremonies whose purpose was to raise up sachems, and their religious festivals--the

Maple, Strawberry, Planting, Green Corn, Harvest, and New Year's festivals.

In conclusion, based upon the accounts from which the data were drawn, North American Indian athletic games were not without ceremonial relationship. Indeed, within Native North America, athletic games were integrated into tribal ceremonial culture in a number of ways.